

MINUTES FOR February 5, 2009
MEETING OF THE PEDESTRIAN AND TRAFFIC SAFETY
ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Members Present: Erwin Mack, Chair, Alyce Ortuzar; Ken Hartman, B-CC Regional Service Center; Colleen Mitchell, Peter Moe, MSHA, MHSO; James D'Andrea; Doris Depaz; Jack Strausman; Ben Stutz for Councilmember Valerie Ervin; Arthur Holmes, MCDOT;

Members Absent: John Howley; Steve Friedman; Alan Migdall; Lt. Ronald Smith, MCPD; Bill Bronrott, Vice Chairman; John Britton; Charles Kines;

County Staff: Tom Pogue; Jeff Dunckel, Pedestrian Safety Coordinator; Andrea Turner, Larry McGoogin, Safe Routes To School Coordinator; Patricia Shepherd;

Guests: Jeremy Martin, Rockville Traffic & Transportation Commission; Jon Oberg, Rockville Traffic & Transportation Commission; Harry Thomas, Rockville Traffic & Transportation Commission; Nestor Alvarenga, CASA de Maryland.

Agenda Items:

1. Introductions
2. Cedar Lane Bike Lane
3. Role of Education – Speaking from Experience
4. Input of Prioritization of Pedestrian Safety
5. Meeting with County Executive-February 12, 7:00pm
6. Review of PTSAC's Charge
7. PEPCO – Electrification of Facilities
8. Committee Comments/New Items for Future Agendas:

Item 1: Introductions. The meeting came to order at approximately 7:05 p.m. A larger group was assembled with additional guests from the City of Rockville's Traffic & Transportation Commission. The meeting was conducted by Chairman Erwin Mack.

Jeff Dunckel discussed what was in the meeting packet that was distributed to members. He then discussed the November minutes' key issues: road code revisions, action plan from CountyStat and the role of the committee. The committee wanted more input on what the agendas would be, rather than merely having briefings on the latest County activities. Today's meeting agenda was assembled from Erwin Mack and Alan Migdall issues requested to be on the agenda.

Dunckel went over the agendas from January Steering Committee and Implementation Group meetings.

Earlier in the week, Ben Stutz had sent out electronic version of the council packet for Bill 35 08.

Art Holmes said that the recent CountyStat review (January 30, 2009) looked at 2008 data of ped collisions. You can see a bump up in collisions in 2008. We have started to make some progress in implementing the Pedestrian Safety Program. But looking at number of accidents, we don't yet know why there has been an increase-- the CountyStat gives you in-depth looks at kind of things that might cause the accidents and things you can do to prevent it. He is excited about what is going on, the activities that are underway, even though we've seen a bump up in collisions. He believes that long-term, we will see a decrease in pedestrian accidents.

Mr. Tom Pogue went over Larry McGoogin's role as the Safe Routes to School Coordinator, which is to look for ways to work with the elementary schools and middle schools to make the schools safer for kids to walk and bike to. This involves education, engineering, and enforcement, such as procedures of how parents drop off kids, and looking for ways to get rid of barriers to walking and eliminate them.. McGoogin will be going out to schools and reporting back to the committee in future meetings.

Larry McGoogin discussed his meeting with Rachel Carson's School Principal concerning his policy of discouraging student from biking to school. Larry noted the high volume of auto traffic around the school. The principal is concerned about the confusion of traffic and kids on the school grounds and the safety of biking students. Alyce Otuzar asked for clarification of the Principal's concerns. McGoogin described that there was a lot of confusion when after school activities took place. There were only two crossing guards. McGoogin proposed to work with the Principal on the issue next school year regarding alternate solutions for students riding bikes to school. Colleen Mitchell mentioned that some schools encourage vehicles to park a few blocks away from the school and walk kids to the door - - remote drop off. McGoogin said he would see if the Principal might consider this for next school year.

The committee reviewed the November minutes. Mack moved to accept them. Peter Moe offered an amendment that the discussion of the mission of the Committee reflect the statutory need for the committee to produce an annual report, as was discussed last November. The change was agreed to by the committee; staff will revise the minutes to reflect this need for an annual report. With this amended change, the minutes were unanimously approved by the Committee.

Dunckel reported that he had been unable to complete the January minutes. These will be available before the March meeting, along with the minutes from this meeting.

Mr. Tom Pogue reported on a planned press event in March or April to celebrate completion of MCDOT's sidewalk project on US29. MCDOT would try to notify committee members earlier on these type of events. The ground breaking ceremony already happened; the project is over a million dollars to improve pedestrian safety, building a new sidewalk.

Item 2: Cedar Street Bike Lane. This was an agenda item requested by Alan Migdall. Unfortunately, Migdall had a conflict with work travel and could not attend tonight's meeting.

Pat Shepard, Project Manager for MCDOT's Transportation Engineering Division, to begin the discussion, handed out a 3-page newsletters that had been distributed to residents. This is a bike lane improvement project – Cedar Street is a short block w/13 residents that abut the street – MCDOT introduced bike lane earlier on this one way northbound street – MCDOT now proposes a contra-flow bike lane along Westside where there currently exist permit parking. This raised concern over the safety of bikers, as well as residents, drivers in parked cars, and pedestrians. MCDOT originally put concrete wood stops to separate bikes from vehicles – trying to do something quickly but ended up not working because there was trash and debris accumulating and residents would trip over the stops – so the stops were removed but the exiting signage remained designating a southbound bikelane traveling into oncoming northbound traffic – there were no proper access - it needed to be revisited. In May there was a video regarding the worse bike lanes in the nation – and Cedar Street was one of them. This led to Mr. Holmes to getting emails that we need to fix the problem – one of many priorities. After evaluating the options, this project we came up with 2 concepts: option 1, a bike lane on the west side of Cedar, with parking moved to the east side of the road, and option 2, bike lane on the west side of Cedar, with parking remaining on the Westside of the road, as it currently exists. Residents were notified and asked to identify which option they preferred - they chose Option 2, leaving parking where it currently is. MCDOT prefers Option 1, with the bike lane on the non-parking side of the street. Because this requires a shift in the parking that currently exists (change in the status quo), MCDOT needs to obtain 2/3 residents concurrence. Forms were sent to 13 residents. 5 residents responded preferring concept 2 – which was not to shift the parking.

Much discussion ensued. The Committee expressed their opinion that Option 1 is safer for the community, having a bike lane along the curb without parking. Shepherd stated that MCDOT's preferred option was also Option 1.

Dunckel summarized what he understood Migdall's concerns to be. Others on the committee shared those concerns. Peter Moe cited concerns over drivers in cars not being able to see oncoming bikes if the cars continued to park on the west side of the street. Ortuzar asked whether the community was initially involved; Shepherd reviewed a series of efforts made to involve the property owners, and seek their support.

A motion was made regarding Cedar Street Bike Lane: ***The Committee recognizes that Concept Number 1 (with parking on the east side of the street) is a safer facility for bicyclists, residents and pedestrians. The Committee encourages the County to seek further input from the residents on approving Concept 1.*** This motion passed unanimously.

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Ortuzar suggested that bike advocates should work to convince residents to support concept 1. Because County does not have a majority of resident approving the safer concept, the Committee is recommending the County go back to residents and let them know that the PTSAC supports Concept 1.

Item 3: Role of Education-Speaking from Experience.

Erwin Mack shared with the Committee the terrible experience he had just had being in an accident and hitting a pedestrian who was crossing mid-block from between stopped cars, approximately 20 feet away from a clearly designated cross walk. This occurred eastbound on University, near New Hampshire, while he was one his way to an interview with Pat Collins regarding a recent ped fatality at the Takoma Langley Crossroads. He wanted the committee to know about this, because if it happened to him, it could happen to anyone. Mack wants to know how or what can we do to educate residents to not cross in the middle of the road, when there is a nearby crosswalk, and to not step into the paths of oncoming cars without looking. Fortunately, Mack was traveling slowly and the woman hit was not seriously injured. Nonetheless, it as an upsetting incident for Mack. The need for better education efforts was discussed. Perhaps we would need to draft illustrations for minorities. Doris Depaz will be conducting the first survey of Pedestrians on Piney Branch Road on Tuesday the 10th. We will use the results of this survey to target issues and problems and learn how to communicate safety to public. Ken Hartman was at the CountyStat presentation. He stated he a lot from the Street Smart November campaign and from recent Piney Branch recommendations. Tom Pogue said we need to make sure we direct our marketing toward the audience with appropriate messages. The Piney Branch effort will involve a sizeable outreach education effort.. MCDOT will work with CASA and other groups and try to build an outreach network. This survey is first step in trying to define the problem and find out best way to communicate to the community.

Moe announced the March 24 Street Smart kick off campaign. Past Street Smart educational approach is direct – picture of someone getting hit by car – audio message in eng/span is also direct – screaming person, screeching car brakes and siren. In education, you have to be extremely direct in dangers of crossing the street. The current campaign is not as “in your face” Many other issues considered like lighting and motorists.

Item 4: Input of Prioritization of Pedestrian Safety Activities.

Dunckel led the Committee through an exercise to prioritize a series of pedestrian safety measures. A sheet listing all current programs elements was handed out. These program elements were complied from the original CE's Ped Safety Initiative, as well as other established priorities from the Action Plan. MCDOT has been asked to list the activities from highest to lowest, as to “which activities would you choose to do first if you got the entire budget approved.” After describing each of the activities and actions on the list, Dunckel described the value voting approach to prioritizing the list. Each member of the committee was given 12 sticky dots. They were to place the dots at the activities that

were most important from their perspective. Multiple dots could be placed at very important measures. In fact, if one measure was absolutely most important to a member, they could place all 12 dots on that location if they wanted. The results would give the group a general sense of which activities the group thought were the most important. The results of this prioritization are attached to these minutes.

This prioritization was used as advice and input to the Implementation Group, who would be doing the same thing next week.

Item 5: Meeting with County Executive – February 12, 7:00pm.

Several members volunteered to attend. Members will send their suggested comments for the meeting to Erwin Mack. Dunckel agreed to send out an email to the Committee asking who would attend and what issues they wanted discussed with the CE.

Item 6: Review of PTSAC's Charge.

Mack recapped the Committee's role and responsibilities, per the enabling legislation. We made clear that no member could speak for the Committee, unless the Committee had authorized them to do so. Individuals could speak on issues, but they speak for themselves unless authorized by the Committee to speak for the Committee.

Item 7: PEPCO – Electrification of Facilities.

Mack led the discussion on the importance of adequate street lighting. He encouraged members to report problem areas to either the County or to PEPCO. Several locations were identified that had not yet been electrified. Jack Strausman immediately began emailing (Blackberry) his contacts at PEPCO regarding these locations and promised to look into the matter when he returned to the office. He would report back to the Committee. He mentioned that sometime electrification of projects is delayed if PEPCO has not received payment.

Item 8: Committee Comments/New Items.

Ben Stutz briefed Committee on status and evolving wording of Bill 35-08.

New business: Colleen Mitchell asked about Silver Spring Libraries and the provisions aspects for pedestrians. The project could involve a pedestrian bridge or a mid-block crossing. She wanted the Committee to take up the issue. Stutz told the Committee that unless something was received from the Committee by February 11, their opportunity to comment would have passed. Several members expressed the desire to take up the issue and develop a Committee position on pedestrian provisions at the Silver Spring Library. In light of the short time frame, Dunckel agreed to send the Committee an email and tell them to contact Mitchell if they would be willing to confer on a position. Mitchell

volunteered to lead the effort. Stutz reiterated that any comments from the Committee would have to be received by noon, February 11.

Stutz briefed Committee on the Silver Spring Library project proposal, and its history.

John Oberg (guest) asked the Committee if it received fatality investigation/accident reconstruction reports. He noted they're often thorough and informative. Dunckel remembered that he used to get these for Ped Fatales back in 2000/2001/2002 period – especially when transit passengers were involved. Moe noted agencies and police are very reluctant to share these reports for privacy and investigative reasons. Suggested summarizing them for groups like this Committee. Every time there is a fatality in the County the County accident reconstruction unit does a very long investigation. We have requested copies for our review to see what happened and sometimes we get good investigation information and sometimes not – they don't look at pedestrian behavior. Committee thought that more attention to these reports and learning from these stats would be a very good tool.

Peter Moe moved a motion that ***the Committee recommends that crash records/reports be provided to key County technical staff so that they can use this information to improve pedestrian safety throughout the County.*** The motion was approved unanimously

Next Meeting Dates – Next meeting dates – first Thursday every other month and if needed, additional meetings in between.

Peter Moe would like a future update for WABA?

Item 8: Adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 9:15 p.m. The next meeting of the Advisory Committee will take place on March 5, 7:00 p.m., in the EOB's 15th floor conference room.

Minutes prepared by Roselle Paquette, MCDOT.

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